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SUBJECT: "U.S. SUPPORT IS KEY" FOR SLOVENIA'S MOUNTAIN WARFARE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

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Classified By: CDA Brad Freden, reasons 1.4(b,d)

Summary

11. (C) In a December 9 meeting with Ambassador Ghafari, new Slovene Defense Minister Ljubica Jelusic stressed that "U.S. support is key" to Slovenia's efforts to have its Mountain Warfare School accredited as a NATO Center of Excellence (COE) (ref A). In separate November 14 and December 15 meetings, Major Bor Baldermann, the school's director, and Lt. Leon Percic, the lead instructor, outlined the plans for the school to become a COE by 2010 and requested that the U.S. be the primary supporting nation. As part of that support, Baldermann suggested that an American should be the center's deputy commander. Baldermann said that the Slovenia's CHOD General Gutman has sent a Letter of Intent to NATO's Allied Command for Transformation (ACT) in Norfolk and that Slovenia will host a conference to finalize a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in April or May 2009. Post recommends that the U.S. support the school's efforts to become a COE by stepping forward at the MOU conference as a supporting nation.

Slovenia's NATO Niche

12. (C) In a December 9 meeting, Defense Minister Jelusic emphasized Slovenia's commitment to NATO missions such as ISAF and Slovenia's need to "concentrate and specialize" in order to maximize its contribution to NATO (ref A). She highlighted developing Slovenia's Mountain Warfare School as the centerpiece of Slovenia's focus on specialization. Jelusic explained that Slovenia's "capabilities and culture" make the proposed COE a perfect "niche to support our alliance partners," and that "U.S. support is key" to Slovenia's efforts.

The Road to Excellence

13. (C) On December 15, Major Baldermann and Lt. Percic told ODC chief and emboff that General Gutman had signed the Letter of Intent (LOI) and sent it to ACT in early December. The LOI is the second of three phases in the COE accreditation process. In fall 2008, ACT approved Slovenia's concept paper for the mountain warfare COE; this paper outlined how the mountain warfare school fits the NATO criteria for a COE and what concrete actions Slovenia is taking to prepare for COE status. If ACT approves the LOI, Slovenia will enter the final phase--negotiations on an MOU. When negotiations begin (tentatively April or May 2009,

according to Baldermann), the "framework nation" (Slovenia) needs a "supporting nation" in order to proceed with negotiations. ACT has already included the Mountain Warfare School on its public list of COEs, with a note that it is not yet accredited (see http://transnet.act.nato.int/wise/tncc/centre_sofe).

¶4. (SBU) In January 2009, Percic and another instructor will visit the U.S. Army Mountain Warfare School in Jericho, Vermont, to exchange ideas and experiences in course development and training standards. Percic explained that Slovenia's school is already aligning its courses with ACT directives for design, content, and evaluation. Slovenia's school also has an unofficial agreement with Norway's Cold Weather Operations COE to cooperate on course sequencing and to avoid duplicative training.

Comment

¶5. (C) Since the first Slovenian approach to Post seeking support for a mountain warfare COE in early 2007 (ref B), the Mountain Warfare School has made significant progress. The school could become a key link in the training chain for NATO forces deploying to Afghanistan, with the August 2008 training of a Latvian platoon on its way to Afghanistan a prime example. As Minister Jelusic's comments illustrated, Slovenia's commitment to NATO is strong; and a COE employing Slovene expertise in mountain warfare and emphasizing unit, rather than individual, training would be a valuable contribution to the alliance. Post recommends that the U.S. prepare for and announce its support at the April/May MOU

conference.

FREDEN